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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed 368 letters (179 children letters and 189 adult letters) in order to document children's thinking about the substance of the epistolary genre and to determine the influence of the adult pen pal letters on the children's letters. Students, 19 third graders and 19 college students, were randomly paired as pen pals. Establishing six letter types, a continuum containing these categories was developed: (1) Search and Respond; (2) Question or Parallel; (3) Initiate Conversation; (4) Initiate and Elaborate; (5) Initiate, Elaborate and Share Personal Response; and (6) Acknowledge, Initiate, Elaborate and Share Personal Response. Findings show that young children, without formal instruction, detect and increasingly adopt a number of the distinctive letter features: cordial openings and closings, question and answer patterns, initiation of new topics of conversation, and expressions of gratitude. Conclusions suggest that young students have a great need for strong letter writing models. (Contains 45 references and 5 figures of data, including a continuum of six letter types studied, writing samples, and a scatter plot of two letter writers.) (SC)

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When Third Graders Write Letters to College Pen Pals: An Analysis of Genre and Intertextual Understandings

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When Third Graders Write Letters to College Pen Pals:
An Analysis of Genre and Intertextual Understandings

Dear Jessie,

Hi! You still didn't answer my question can we be pen pal's not just in school I mean for a long time. I never had a pen pal before. Just you. I had a good time being pen pals with you. i don't want to stop being pen pals with you...

Sincerely,
Judy

The epistolary genre has a long and rich tradition in western culture. The earliest extant Greek letters date back to fourth century BC—two centuries before the first story was written on clay tablets. The early Greeks used letters to inform, to praise, to console as well as to sustain the bonds of friendship. Plato and Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers also used letters to call students to a life of contemplation and virtue. Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, perhaps the most famous of the hortatory letters, urges the ruler of Cyprus to forsake worldly goods and pleasures, and to take up a life of virtuous activity. In antiquity, letter-writing was not a subject of formal rhetorical education. Rather, the art of letter writing "was taught by the imitation of models rather than through theory and comprehensive rules" (Stowers, 1986, p. 33).

Educators have long recognized the values of letter writing. Although John Dewey (1959/1899) did not address letter writing specifically, his conviction about the place of literacy in the curriculum suggests support for such engagement:

> Reading and writing...can be done in a *related* way, as the outgrowth of the child's social desire to recount his experiences and get in return the experiences of others, directed always through contact with the facts and forces which determine the truth communicated. (p. 66)

Dewey's insistence that language instruction spring from a "real desire to communicate vital impressions and convictions" (p. 66) gave rise to the adoption of letter writing curricula. Many progressive educators believed that "the school paper is a useful outlet for this social impulse and letter-writing is probably its most universal and valuable expression" (Leonard, 1917, p. 33). Language arts textbooks devoted whole chapters to examining the form, style, and content of letters (Hatfield, 1935; McKee, 1934). Teachers were encouraged to read letters written to children by famous people, such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Theodore Roosevelt, and to

explore with children their qualities of excellence. It was suggested that model letters be hung in the classroom where children could examine their formats, and use the format first in isolation and then in letters which they wrote to friends and family (Walsh, 1929). Given the prominence of letter writing in the early part of this century, it is not surprising that pen pal projects between college students and children began to emerge in the 1920s (Ayres, Buchanan & Park, 1930).

Related Research

Over the last two decades, Dewey's beliefs about literacy have witnessed a revival. In literature-based reading and writing programs, children read and write for genuine purposes within a social context, experiment with a variety of genres, and receive skillful and responsive instruction, grounded in authentic contexts. Teachers create "settings in which learners experience an urgent need to read and write in order to achieve ends other than learning about reading and writing" (Cambourne, 1988, p. 64). It is this pursuit of real-world engagement that has prompted the reemergence of pen pal projects. Although a number of pen pal studies have noted the affective and social benefits of letter exchanges for children and their pen pals (senior citizens or adult learners) (Ashe, 1987; Bryant 1989; Foster, 1989; Dorotik and Betzold, 1992), only four studies have addressed the issue of literacy growth in children's letters (Crowhurst, 1990; Greenlee, Hiebert, Bridge, Winograd, 1982; Rankin, 1992; Yellin, 1987). In all of these studies, university students exchanged letters with elementary children for a semester. Researchers found that when children write for audiences other than their teacher, their letters are longer, and their meaning and syntax are more complex.

Crowhurst's (1990) study moved beyond the analysis of linguistic features, such as length and syntax, to an analysis of changes in the communicative aspects of young writers' letters. Other than a brief introduction to letter format on the first day, the sixth graders in the study received no letter writing instruction during the semester-long project. When Crowhurst compared the children's first letters to later letters, she found increases in communicative openings and closings, number of questions asked, topics "taken up," and expressions of appreciation to pen pals. She attributed these increases to the effect of a real audience.

Crowhurst (1990) also makes informal mention that: "The influence of their correspondents' letters were clearly evident. In some cases, openings or closings were adopted verbatim; in other cases, ideas were adopted though wording might be different" (p. 14). This phenomenon—the influence of a text that is read or heard on the act of composing—has been the subject of recent investigations of intertextuality. Text is defined as any sign (literature, television, film, dance, art, a road sign, a smile) used in social interactions (Short, 1992). Although the construct of intertextuality has been the subject of extensive scrutiny in the literary world, it is a relative newcomer to education (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993). Much of the recent research in intertextuality is grounded in the work of Russian literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin. In his analysis of Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin traced the diverse social viewpoints of fictional characters and proposed his theory of heteroglossia:

> ...the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances.... Our speech, that is all our utterances (including creative works) is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees 'our-own- ness,' varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate. (1986, p. 89)

Essentially, Bakhtin disputes the notion of text as an autonomous work of a solitary writer. Rather, he posits that every text has the fingerprints of every other text. Writers absorb a world of ideas—historical, social, and political—from their social milieus and then reiterate, rework, and/or reenvision these ideas in the creation of their own texts. Every text reverberates with the voices of others. Moreover, these echoing voices materialize in the form of speech genres which Bakhtin (1986) describes as "relatively stable typical forms of construction of the whole" (p. 87). Speech genres are the blueprints of discourse—language maps that give form to and are embedded in our social interactions. Knowledge of speech genres enables us to exchange greetings, to resist advertisements, to write scientific reports and so forth (Bakhtin, 1986).

Recent studies have begun to trace the vitality of intertextuality in young children's writing. In interviews, sixth graders acknowledge the intertextual links (particularly story plots) they make between published stories and their own stories (Cairney, 1990). While third graders may not acknowledge intertextual influences to the same degree as sixth graders, their story writing attests

to extensive appropriation of others' ideas (Bearse, 1992). When children as young as six years old are encouraged to write, to draw, to act out, and to talk about their stories, intertextual links soar (Cairney, 1992; Chapman, 1995). When children are invited to explore their cultural heritage, their personal narratives and essays resonate the polyphonic voices of their lives—family, friends, church, community and historical mentors. And in the process, these children begin to forge personal, social, and political identities (Kamberelis & Scott, 1992).

While interest in the construct of genre has mushroomed recently, little research beyond the landmark study on the genres of story (Applebee, 1978) and nonfiction (Langer, 1986; Newkirk, 1987) has been conducted in the area of genre development (Chapman, 1995; Kamberelis, 1993). But it is known that children as early as first grade abstract features of particular genres in increasingly sophisticated ways (Chapman, 1995; Newkirk, 1987). The abstraction process depends on the social context—the events internalized, the literature shared, the social interactions experienced. When genres are viewed as social actions used to satisfy writers' needs to influence readers in particular ways, children write in a variety of genres with intense preoccupation.

Much of the intertextual research has focused on children's appropriations during story writing. No studies have formally investigated the degree to which young writers "borrow" features of the friendly letter through multiple interactions with pen pals' letters nor the nature of children's constructs about the epistolary genre. Unlike stories which are deeply embedded in children's psyches, letters, for the most part, are outside of their realm of continuous activity. When children are immersed in such activity, without direct instruction, the potential for rich intertextual linkages emerges. The desire to accommodate the expectations, knowledge, and emotions of the reader prompts intertextual scaffolding and active engagement in social dynamics.

This study, then, seeks to widen the lens on children's intertextual and genre understandings. We hypothesized that our young pen pals would intuit multiple communicative features of their adult pen pals' letters and would refine their understandings of the epistolary genre over time. These hypotheses became the focal point of our investigation.

The Present Study

The contents of children's pen pal letters were analyzed in order to document children's thinking about the substance of the epistolary genre, and to determine the influence of the adult pen pal letters on the children's letters. Our research questions were:

1. What do children do, in the absence of direct instruction, when they respond to college pen pal letters? Do their responses change over time?
2. What intertextual links do young writers make as a result of their engagement with college pen pal letters? What communicative aspects remain inaccessible?

Knowing what children can do currently through their own, independent problem-solving and what they can do only with guidance from more knowledgeable others can shed light on the interconnectedness of development and instruction and can help to set the parameters for responsive instruction in the epistolary genre (Vygotsky, 1978).

Method

Participants

The 11 female and 8 male third graders who participated in this study attended an elementary school in a suburban, middle-class New England town. At the outset of this project, these children had been reading and writing extensively for four months. In daily writing workshop, they choose their own topics, genres, and writing timelines. In daily reading workshop, they selected their own books, read at their own pace, and wrote dialogue journal entries. Minilessons, conferences with peers and with teachers, as well as group share time were integral parts of both workshops.

These nineteen third graders were paired randomly with nineteen college students who were enrolled in an education course on literacy. Thirteen of the students were undergraduates; the remaining six were graduate students. Seventeen students were female; two were male. The course served as an introduction to reading and writing acquisition in elementary-age children.

Project Description

In the college classroom, prior to the any exchange of letters, the students were apprised of the

rationale and goals of the project. The written guidelines included statements such as:

> The primary focus of this project is to delight in the young child who is about to enter your life. In each of your letters, talk about things that matter to you and that will be of interest to an eight-year-old. Share not only events, but also your thoughts and feelings about these events.

Reminders about their role as language models were emphasized. Using examples of college pen pal letters from previous semesters, along with the children's return letters, the essential aspects of letter writing were discussed. For example, the impact of a string of questions on the child's return letter was examined and the importance of asking only one or two open-ended questions was established.

The college students wrote weekly to their third grade pen pals, and enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope. Letters were delivered each Wednesday to Alice (classroom teacher and participating author) who distributed them to the children the next morning. The children were asked to write their return letters within two days. They could write their letters during writing workshop at school, or at home.

Alice proposed the pen pal project to her third graders, shared her excitement about past pen pal projects, and asked them if they would like to participate. Her enthusiasm and persuasiveness no doubt influenced the children's unanimous decision to participate. Throughout the project, the teacher logged notes about the buzz of excitement that filled the classroom when letters arrived. The children were eager to open them, to read each others' letters, to share news with their friends, and to explain the contents of their return letters.

No direct instruction in either letter content or letter format was provided. We trusted that the children would make intertextual linkages about the function and form of letters as they interacted with their pen pals' letters. Because most of the letter writing occurred during writing workshop, the children could confer with Alice if they had questions about their pen pals' letters.

Data Analysis

Children's Letters

A discourse analysis of 368 letters (179 children letters and 189 adult letters) was undertaken to

"discover patterns of communication that have functional relevance" (Flori-Ruane, 1987, p. 186). The principles of analytic induction guided the design of this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The children's letters were read repeatedly in order to identify common patterns of discourse. These patterns were translated into coding categories which, in turn, were used to code individual sentences in each child's (and corresponding adult's) letters. Subsequent analysis of the attributes which constituted engaging versus less engaging letters gave rise to a continuum of increasingly sophisticated letter types. The children's letters then were rated in accordance with letter types on this continuum.

The data analysis began with the children's first letters because they offered an impressive but manageable range of response. First letters of each pen pal team (child and adult) were read, and analytic memos containing hunches about certain patterns of response were recorded (Bogden & Biklin, 1992). These rudimentary patterns were used to create a preliminary coding system. These codes then were tested against all 19 sets of the first letters as follows:

a) The first adult letter was read and coded. The child's first letter was placed beside the adult letter and was coded in conjunction with the adult's letter. For example, if the adult asked a question about personal information, that sentence was coded AQ-PI on the adult letter. If the child responded to the question, that response was coded RQ-PI on the child's letter.

b) Codes were revised to reflect patterns of response not originally noted. For example, when it was noted that many children were not responding to some of their pen pals' questions, the code, IQ-PI (ignored question about personal information), was created and applied.

c) A tentative coding system was drafted.

With the knowledge that first letters generally were not representative of later letters, four random sets of letters (approximately ten letters per child and ten letters per adult over the course of the semester—a total of eighty letters) were chosen to test the coding system. Not surprisingly, a number of new codes were added (particularly with regard to book talks), and some original codes were deleted/revised. Using this revised coding system, the initial four sets were recoded, along with the remaining fifteen.

During the coding of the first letters, preliminary observations concerning children's hypotheses about the epistolary genre began to emerged. It appeared that some children viewed letters solely as a vehicle for answering their college pen pals' question. Other children viewed letters as a place not only to respond to pen pals' questions but also to initiate their own topics of conversation, suggesting a higher level of communication. Still others intuited the function of letters as a place to shares one's thoughts and feelings about life events and to acknowledge the messages of the sender. Hence, the initial analysis of first letters resulted in a continuum of letter types—from the most basic to the most engaging. Characteristics that distinguished "engaging" letters included a) a sensitivity to audience, evidenced by answering pen pal's questions, by acknowledging topics of conversation, and by extending good will, gratitude, or compliments, b) a sharing of not only personal events but also thoughts and feelings about these events, and c) an effort to organize ideas to facilitate the pen pal's comprehension.

At each point on the continuum, the primary attributes for each letter type were established. Recognizing the limitations of first letters, though, the tentative continuum was tested against every child's fifth letter. This analysis resulted in a major revision of the continuum. The children's letters contained such an array of attributes that the continuum was reconceptualized in terms of both primary attributes and optional attributes. The final continuum, presented in Figure 1, contained six letter types of increasing sophistication. In order to be categorized at a certain point on the continuum, a letter needed to include the primary attributes associated with that letter type. In addition, with the exception of letter type 1, the letter also needed to include one or more of the optional attributes. When a child's letter met all but one of the primary or optional attributes, it was dropped one point on the continuum. For example, if a child initiated a new topic of conversation and included one optional attribute (suggesting a type 3 letter) but did not answer at least a quarter of his/her pen pal's questions, the letter was dropped to a type 2.

All sets of letters were reread and categorized against these attribute requirements by the first author. The second author then reread all letters to verify that letters were coded and rated accurately. In this respect, the second author served as a triangulating analyst, checking to see that

the letter categories made sense and that the data were categorized accurately (Patton, 1990). Discrepant ratings were discussed and rated again.

College Pen Pal Letters

The college pen pal letters were coded and rated in accordance with the continuum of letter types (Figure 1) to ensure that they evidenced essential communicative features. The ratings of the first letters were not included in the analysis because they were not written in response to a child's letter. Ninety-eight percent of the adult letters were categorized as either type 6 (75%) or type 5 (23%). Nearly all of the type 5 letters occurred because college pen pals answered most but not all of their child's questions; in a few instances, the college pen pal failed to acknowledge at least one event that the child shared. Interestingly, of the five college pen pals who consistently wrote type 6 letters, and the four college pen pals who also consistently wrote type 6 letters with the exception of one type 5 letter, none of their third graders wrote letters at the type 5 or 6 level; two children, in fact, wrote only type 1, 2, and 3 letters. On the other hand, the only two college pen pals who wrote a majority of type 5 letters had third graders writing at least two type 5 or 6 letters.

One type 4 letter and three type 3 letters also were written by college pen pals at the beginning of the semester. In two instances, the type 3 letters were written when the children asked many questions. For example, one child asked eight questions which the college pen pal answered in elaborated paragraphs across a three-page letter. Given the length of the letter, it appeared that the college pen pal decided to do little initiation of new topics of conversation and so forth.

Results

A Continuum of Pen Pal Letter Types

The continuum in Figure 1 describes the impressive range of knowledge that young children bring to the genre of letter writing. While evidence will be presented later concerning the number of children who wrote at least one letter at a higher point on the continuum over the second half of the semester, there is no suggestion that this continuum represents a fixed course of development. The findings with regard to the continuum of letter types follow.

Type 1: Search and Respond

Type 1 letters constituted the most basic letter type. Children writing type 1 letters appeared to view the purpose of letter writing as essentially one of answering their pen pals' questions. They did not ask their pen pals questions, initiate new topics of conversation, or acknowledge personal events that pen pals shared. While relatively few third graders (n=6) wrote type 1 letters, the purest ones, not surprisingly, were found within the first three letters. Only nine type 1 letters (.05%) were penned over the course of the semester. In order to be categorized a type 1 letter, the child had to respond to a majority of the pen pal's questions.

Primary Attribute of Type 1 Letters: Having established the most salient feature of the letter as "the question," these six writers adopted a search and respond stance: search the text for a question and write a one sentence response. An example of a type 1 letter follows:

> I dont know what town I lived in because I was three. No I dont like moving because your seperated from you friends. I love the snow I realy bont know why I like snow. No I havent made a time line and thank you for the heart. Yes I do have a brother.

Optional Attributes of Type 1 Letters: Optional attributes adopted by some type 1 letter writers included cordial openings and closings and expressions of gratitude. Of the 9 letters (three written by one child) in this category, only three contained either a brief opening or a closing; the remaining letters contained neither. Interestingly, four of the nine type 1 letters contained expressions of gratitude. For example, three children thanked their pen pals for sending their pictures; one of the three also thanked his pen pal for sending a valentine heart.

Type 2: Question or Parallel

Forty-two type 2 letters (23%) were written over the course of the semester by 15 children; the highest distribution occurred within the first 6 letters. In order to be categorized as a type 2 letter, writers had to pose a question(s) to their college pen pals or to parallel (explained below) a portion of their pen pals' content. In addition, they had to answer at least one of their pen pals' questions and include one of the optional attributes (see Figure 1).

Primary Attributes of Type 2 Letters: Children in this category showed a beginning understanding of the reciprocal nature of correspondence. Attentive to the fact that their college pen pals asked questions about family, hobbies, and the like, eleven children followed suit. Examples of the children's questions (unedited) included: "What books do you like?" "What is your favorite sport?" "do you live alone?" "do you have a boyfriend?!!!"

While twenty-five (60%) of the forty-two type 2 letters contained one or more questions, the remainder showed another intriguing pattern of intertextual response. Rather than adopt the questioning strategy, a number of children paralleled their pen pals' content. Paralleling occured when a child, without the prompt of a question, closely aligned the content of his/her letter with that of his/her college pen pal. The child pays close attention to the ideas of his/her pen pal, and then leans on these ideas while crafting his/her own letter. The fewer questions asked by the college pen pal, the greater the likelihood of this pattern of response from the child. The following excerpts from type 2 letters illustrate the paralleling phenomenon.

College Pen Pal	Child Pen Pal
I am looking forward to getting to know you but first I will tell you about myself.	I like to meet you. Let me tell you about me.
Well, I just finished my science homework. For the last week, my class has observed a mealworm. Do you know what kind of animal that is? In case you do not, I will tell you it eventually changes into a beetle. Now it looks like a small worm... I will draw a picture for you .... (includes drawing, labels head)	Last science class I had was about "Dinosors." Then we started to learn about "trilobites." trilobites are bugs that lived in the water and eat plants. they live along time ago. But on page 90 in our scince book show a real one! and we made moldes of them... the trilobite looks like this (Child labels 3 parts of drawing)

As the following example shows, the paralleling attempts of two children extended to efferent responses about literature during the second half of the semester. The college pen pal asked no questions about books that the child might be reading; rather the child piggybacked on the pen pal's idea about a book talk.

College Pen Pal	Child Pen Pal
I read Tuck Everlasting, a wonderful story about the connection between 3 strange events in a small town, even	James and the Giant Peach was about a boy "James" he lived with his curl aunts. and then a humonges peach

though the events don't seem to be connected at first. In the story a young girl named Winnie meets up with a very mysterious family, the Tucks. I can't tell you any more because I wouldn't want to ruin it for you.

grew and one day James went in the peach, then it rolled over aunt spunge and aunt spiker I don't want to spoyle the end for you.

In addition to the inclusion of a question(s) or an instance of paralleling, type 2 letters had to include a response to at least one of the college pen pal's questions. In over half of the letters in this category, the children responded to all of their college pen pals' questions; about 12% of the letters included responses to one question only.

Optional Attributes of Type 2 Letters: Approximately 43% of the letters contained an opening statement and 24% contained a closing statement, suggesting that many of the type 2 letter writers attended to these features of their adult pen pals. In addition, six of the forty-two type 2 letters contained expressions of gratitude—thank yous for pictures sent or illustrations included. One striking observation with regard to the social courtesy of acknowledgment emerged during the analysis of type 2 letters. When we share personal (or other) events in letters, we expect friends to lend a word of cheer, support, sympathy, and so forth. However, of the 105 personal events/thoughts shared by the college students, only fourteen (13%) were acknowledged by the children who wrote type 2 letters. The events they chose to acknowledge were happy occasions such as holidays, vacations, and birthdays:

College Pen Pal	Child Pen Pal
Monday is Valentine's Day and tomorrow is my birthday. I am going to be 21 years old.	I hope you have a happy birthday.
I had a great time on my Spring Break in Washington D.C..	I'm glad you had a fun vacation in D.C.

However, content of an interesting, serious or sad nature was not acknowledged by any of the children. When pen pals wrote about a pet that died, about missing their families while at college, or about a current event like an earthquake, the children offered no response.

Type 3: Initiate Conversation

Initiating a new topic of conversation was by far the most prominent letter type on the continuum.

Every child wrote at least one type 3 letter; a total of sixty-seven (37%) letters were written. Without prompting from pen pals, type 3 letter writers adopted a truer stance toward letter-writing by sharing personal information or other events. In addition, they answered at least one fourth of their pen pals' questions and included one optional attribute (Figure 1).

Primary Attributes of Type 3 Letters: On average, children wrote four type 3 letters over the course of the semester. One child wrote type 3 letters throughout the semester with the exception of the final letter (type 4). The most popular prototype was one in which children answered some of their pen pals' questions, and then inserted one piece of new conversation, usually one sentence in length. In the letters that follow, the italicized portion of the letters represents the initiated conversation; the underlined text represents the child's answers to questions; the plain text represents content that has been paralleled. Characteristic of letters in this category is the somewhat random flow of information.

> I like to meet you. Let me tell you about me. I like sports my favirte sports are baseball, hockey and basket. *When I grow up I want be a marchal arts siamtist.* I was born and raised in Boston.

> Hi! How are you? I'm find I did sledding and playing I learned from my aunty she is the one wHo gave me the fish. *I was born in 1985, Aug, 5th I am going skiing next week*

A second prominent prototype for the type 3 letter involved not only the initiation of a new topic (one sentence) but also a related question. Interestingly, many of the college pen pals used this organizational scheme in early letters, but the adults wrote a paragraph and then ended with a related question. An example of this type 3 prototype (italicized text) follows.

> Hope you get my letter soon. *Maybe some day we can exchained drawings! My faverite Artist is Leonardo Da vinchee, What's yours? I wish I learned to surf, and ski, What would you wish for? Do they have a hockey team in Cunneticut? I collect cards, books, money, and rocks.* Last Sunday I went to the National Seasore in Cape Cod, and we saw seals in the (water) ocean, and I saw a Blue Heron, and a Wite Crane.

Optional Attributes of Type 3 Letters: More pronounced efforts were made by type 3 writers to open and/or close letters with cordial statements. Over 60% of the letters (n=67) included a cordial opening or closing. In addition, seventeen expressions of gratitude (i.e. "Thank you for the Valentin's." "I loved your kitty cat.") were found in the sixty-seven letters. Six of

these expressions were made by one child; four were made by another. Each of the remaining seven were made by different children.

Small strides were noted in the type 3 letters with regard to acknowledging information shared by the college pen pal. Of the 149 events shared by the college pen pals, thirty-two (22%) were acknowledged by the third graders. Topping the list of acknowledgments were birthdays, upcoming holidays, trips taken or planned, and happy occasions spent with friends or family. As with type 2 letters, content of a sad or serious nature was not acknowledged.

Comparatively few instances (n=15) of paralleling content were noted in type 3 letters; most were found in letters written around the holidays. If the college pen pals wrote about Valentine's Day or Easter, the third graders often did the same.

Type 4: Initiate and Elaborate

In the fifty-one type 4 letters, children not only initiated new topics of conversation but also elaborated (2 or more sentences in length) on at least one of the topics. All but one of the nineteen third graders wrote one or more type 4 letters at some point during the semester. Type 4 letter writers also responded to at least one-half of their pen pals' questions and included two or more optional attributes (Figure 1).

Primary Attributes of Type 4 Letters: As the following examples illustrate, a range of elaboration was noted in type 4 letters:

> Six days ago there was a big fire down town. It bert the top floor. No one got hert.

> I had a good time skiing. Exsept the last time we were going to go down. We got lost and we ended up on the Black dimond. I hit one of the jumps with my left ski, and it crossed over my right and I fell.

Eight children initiated conversations about books they were reading. Of their own accord (no questions asked about literature; no evidence of parallels), these children shared efferent responses:

> Star is about a girl named Toni and Star the house. At first she is scare but then she love's to ride. I can't tell you all the things or I will ront it.

> I'm reading "Aliens for breakfast" My favorite part was when it said the cereal was called Alien crisp I like this part- Crunchy Munchy alien's in a box! Packed on the planet Ganoob and rushed straight to you! It was funny.

In addition to elaborated initiation, these writers chunked related information more successfully and adopted a livelier conversational tone:

> Hi I'm so excited this is my first letter to you. I'm nine years old. My birthday is Oct. 5th. And I have a dog named Suzie-Q Malley her middle name is Q. I describe my family as a little Family. Well Lets talk about My dad he is so funny he likes Box car Willie! Box car Willie is a Western singer. And my Mom likes indians. And my sister Erin likes boys. I like Rap music. I am a tom-boy I like hanging out with my friend especially -- her pen pals name is --. I dislike through up bugs rain mud. See ya!
>
> Your friend, _____
>
> p.s. I like to gosip and talk on the phone. do you like to talk on the phone? Write back

In order to be categorized as a type 4 letter, writers needed to respond to at least half of their pen pals' questions. Fifty-one percent responded to all of the questions asked.

Optional Attributes of Type 4 Letters: Type 4 letters needed to include at least two of optional attributes. For example, forty-three (84%) type 4 letters included either a cordial opening or a closing statement; twelve letters (24%) contained both statements. A marked increase in expressions of good will or endearment also was noted.

Efforts to acknowledge pen pals' personal events increased in type 4 letters. Of the eighteen children who wrote a type 4 letter, twelve acknowledged one event in at least one of their pen pals' letters. As the examples in Figure 2 (Part A) show, the children typically acknowledged happy events or information that related directly to them. However, interesting, serious, or sad content of pen pals' letters (see Figure 2, Part B) was not acknowledged.

Rather than responding to pen pals' questions with a brief one sentence answer, twelve of the eighteen type 4 letter writers elaborated on at least one of their responses (Figure 3). Seven children also wrote extended responses to their pen pals questions about literature (Figure 3).

Instances of paralleling or of asking questions diminished dramatically in type 4 letters. Only five paralleling episodes were coded. Only fourteen questions were asked across fifty-one type 4 letters; the majority occurred within the first four letters. These letter writers sustained conversation without having to parallel or rely on questions.

Type 5: Initiate, Elaborate, and Share Personal Response

Writers of type 5 letters show a beginning understanding about the affective nature of letters. Three children wrote type 5 letters; one child wrote three type 5 letters and two children wrote two letters. All (n=7) were written during the second half of the semester. The primary and optional attributes (Figure 1) are discussed below.

Primary Attributes of Type 5 Letters: The following excerpt of a type 5 letter illustrates the writer's ability not only to recount but also to share the import of her tale—what she thinks and how she feel about life events:

> I like to change the channel and sometimes when I hear a sad song I might cry so I have to change the channel I'm sensative like that.

Type 5 letters showed a greater degree of text coherence than letters in previous categories. These writers were fairly successful at chunking related information. Theresa's sixth letter illustrates this point:

> How are you doing? I'm doing fine. Guess what? I sort of lost you'r letter but it's proubley at school somewhere in my cubby or something so that means that I can't answer any of your questions if you asked me anything I'm sorry. on Monday I'll try to find it. The reason I'm writing to you on Friday is that I was absent on Thursday (St. Patrick's Day) but I wasn't really sick we had an hour delay and my mother suggested that she was not going to send me to school because we had only a half of a Day we only had like three hours of school and I forgot to tell you something Happy St. Patrick's Day!

Even though Theresa does not organize her information in paragraphs, she presents her apology for losing her pen pal's letter, and a coherent explanation about why she is writing on Friday. Type 5 letters also contained expanded responses to questions asked by the college pen pals. In the two letters that contained questions, the third graders offered elaborated responses and included an affective component:

College Pen Pal	Child Pen Pal
Can you please explain to me how syrup is made? I always think about how syrup is made when I pour it over my pancakes!	I am going to tell you abot how to make Maple syrup here is how you find a maple syrup tree and then you put the tap in the tree and then you put a Bucet and then comes out maple syrup it taste very good on your finger.

In addition, five of the seven letters in this category included both a cordial opening and closing; the remaining two letters included one or the other.

Optional Attributes of Type 5 Letters: Of the 25 personal events shared by the college pen pals, seven were acknowledged by the children. Five were acknowledged by one child (example below).

College Pen Pal	Child Pen Pal
Well, I've recovered from my skinned knee (it's now a faint bruise) and have learned my lesson!	I'm glad you recovered you'r skinned knee. Don't feel bad if you have a bruise don't worry I have a lot of them on my legs.

Three of the seven letters contained complimentary remarks; one letter contained an expression of gratitude. These four statements were written by two of the three pen pals.

Type 6: Acknowledge, Initiate, Elaborate and Share Personal Response

The pinnacle of third grade letter writing is captured in Theresa's final letter (Figure 4). Theresa acknowledged her college pen pal's trip to Florida with humor and enthusiasm. She shared her own experiences about Disney and expressed her safety concerns. She included a cordial opening and closing, and organized her letter coherently.

Theresa wrote one type 6 letter; another girl wrote two. Both girls understood the reciprocal nature of letter writing. They understood the importance of offering elaborated conversation, of acknowledging an episode in their pen pals' lives, and of sharing their reaction to their own personal events. However, the fact that both girls acknowledged one aspect of their pen pal's content does not mean that they acknowledged all or even the primary content. Theresa's pen pal, for example, shared her worry about not being a good teacher and about her caterpillar dying; as the above letter shows, Theresa offered no response. Even for these advanced letter writers, trips and pen pal letters remain the focal point for acknowledgment.

Intertextual Links

With the arrival of first letters, the third graders were faced with the challenge of writing return letters (without formal instruction in letter writing). Consciously or unconsciously, many third

graders leaned on the discourse features of their college pen pals' letters in order to construct their own letters. Analysis of first letters attested to the range of intertextual features that they intuited:

• The Question: Because every first adult letter contained questions, it is not surprising that fourteen of the nineteen children incorporated at least one question in their return letters.

• The Question & Answer: Nine of these fourteen children noticed that their pen pals not only asked a question but also included an answer. The children followed suit and incorporated the question and answer pattern into their first letters. Two of the nine discerned the degree of elaboration that characterized the college pen pals' response and replicated this pattern.

• Paralleled Content: Nine of the nineteen children appropriated on the content of their pen pal letters to frame their letters. If the pen pal talked about a hobby, the child talked about his/her hobby. Paralleling occurred without the prompt of a question on the part of the college pen pal.

• Cordial Openings/Closings: Twelve third graders noticed, to varying degrees, this aspect of letter etiquette. Four children included both a friendly opening (often paralleled) and a closing; four others included a friendly opening but no closing statement; four wrote only a closing statement; and seven incorporated neither.

• New Topics of Conversation: Bringing an even greater level of analysis to the text structure, eight youngsters construed the letter as a place where one shares events of personal interest or importance.

However, most of the third graders did not make intertextual connections with respect to:

• Elaboration: When the children initiated a new topic of conversation, they generally wrote a one sentence synopsis. Only three children elaborated (two or more sentences) on topics.

• Personal Response: With the exception of the pen pal project, none of the children offered thoughts or feelings about the topics they shared.

• Expression of gratitude/compliments: Two children expressed excitement about having a pen pal. One girl complimented her pen pal on her "beautiful" name.

• Acknowledgment: While all nineteen college pen pals shared interesting information about themselves, only one boy acknowledged one of his pen pal's events (a trip to Australia).

The children did not acknowledge the information that the college pen pals shared about their families, interests, current events (i.e. earthquake, Olympics) and so forth.

Interestingly, over the course of the semester, some of these discourse features diminished in frequency while others increased. While fourteen third graders asked questions in first letters, only six did so in ninth letters. While nine used the question and answer pattern in first letters, only one used it in her ninth letter. Instances of paralleling diminished to five in final letters. On the other hand, sixteen children initiated new topics of conversation in the ninth letter, compared to eight children in the first letter. Cordial openings and closings were included twice as often in final letters. The number of children acknowledging pleasant events that pen pals shared increased to thirteen in the ninth letters; expressions of gratitude/compliments increased from two to five.

In sum, many intertextual links were forged as these young readers noted specific discourse features and then reconstructed these features in their return letters. Certain discourse features, however, appear to have eluded many third graders, suggesting the need for instruction.

Changes in letter writing over time

In order to examine the changes in the children's letters, we compared the first and final letters. (Note: We made the decision to use the ninth letter when the tenth letter served only as a good-bye letter and was not representative of a typical letter.) Using this conservative measure, we found that six (32%) children wrote letters that were two categories on the continuum than their initial letters, eight (42%) children were one category higher, two remained in the same category, and two dropped a category. We considered this measure conservative because, in a number of cases, it overlooked the child's best evidence. For example, when we compared each child's first letter with his/her best letter (highest letter type) written during the second half of the semester (letters 6-10), we found that: two children's letters were three categories higher, four were two categories higher, nine were one category higher and four remained in the same category.

This is not to suggest that the third graders' letter writing progressed in a steady, gradual fashion. Their letter writing, like their general writing (Graves, 1983), was quite variable. A scatter plot (Figure 5) of Ted's and Theresa's letters across the ten letters illustrates this point.

Theresa's fairly steady upswing during the second half of the semester was replicated by only one other student. Ted's zigzag profile was far more representative of the children in this study. Twelve other children evidenced this variable profile. Four additional children maintained a plateau of three or more letters, and then moved up or down a level, only to plateau again. Tom's ratings (along with adult ratings) were as follows:

Letter #	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Adult:	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	6
Tom:	3	3	3	3	3	3	—	3	4

Because the letter ratings involved both primary and optional attributes, it is important to realize that the letter ratings masked some of the changes that were occurring in the third graders' letters. For example, in the first three letters, Tom included no opening or closing statements; in the last seven letters, he included opening statements. In letter 5, he acknowledges, for the first time, an event (marathon training) about which his college pen pal wrote; in letter 6, he acknowledges a book she mentioned. In his last three letters, he elaborated on answers to questions (i.e. two sentences of information instead of his usual one sentence answer).

Discussion of Findings

Not surprisingly, the phenomenon of literary "thieving":

> Stories lean on stories, art on art. And we who are the tellers and the artists do what has been done for all the centuries of tellings: We thieve (or more politely) borrow and then we make it our own" (Yolen, 1991, p. 147).

extends to the epistolary genre. The third graders in this study forged intertextual connections between their college pen pal letters and their own correspondence. Without formal instruction, they detected and increasingly adopted a number of the distinctive letter features: cordial openings and closings, question and answer patterns, initiation of new topics of conversation, and expressions of gratitude.

Some dimensions of intertextuality, however, were not intuited from adult letters. For example, most children chose not to activate the affective dimension which, in many ways, characterizes the essence of the letter. Although many third graders initiated and elaborated on new

topics of discussion, few offered personal responses to topics raised. Of the 189 topics shared by the third graders across the semester, only 18 topics (10%) included an affective dimension. For the most part, children shared personal events but offered no thoughts or feelings:

> ...Do you know I have a pool in the Back of my house it is 5 feet Deep. But I am moving. See my Grandpa dided and we are moving to his house it is nest to my house...
>
> ... I have 1 dog and 2 cats. My dog we had to put her asleep and 1 of my cat too. Do you like college?
>
> ...My team wun the football game. There is a kidnapper in Dedham. (end of letter)

These examples suggest that these young writers essentially adopted what Rosenblatt (1978, 1991) calls an efferent stance. Rather expressing their thoughts and/or feelings about life events (aesthetic stance), the children merely "reported" on these events. While we have become accustomed to associating Rosenblatt's work on efferent and aesthetic stances with the reading process, Rosenblatt (1995) reminds us that "It is important to keep in mind that *efferent* and *aesthetic* refer, not to the text, but to the reader's (or author's) attitude of mind or focus of attention" (p. 350). Children's affinity for the efferent has been documented in their early writing. Chapman (1995) found that, at the beginning of the school year, most popular genre penned by first graders was the basic record—a single clause entry about an experience. By the end of the year, the most popular genre was the expanded record— a very brief (two or more related clauses) chronology of an experience. This urge to chronicle life events continues throughout elementary school as students delight in writing what Graves (1983) calls "bed-to-bed" narratives. In these personal narratives, children record every event of their day—eventful or otherwise—from morning until night.

This is not to suggest that children are incapable of personal response. In fact, both Chapman (1995) and Newkirk (1987) also found first graders experimenting with attribute series, a series of clauses describing a topic ("My cat is white.") which may include global affective statements ("I like my cat."). As noted above, eighteen instances of this descriptive/affective mix were documented; for example:

> I had a good time skiing. Exsept the last time we were going to go down. We got lost and we ended up on the Black dimond. I hit one of the jumps with my left ski, and it crossed over my right and I fell.

Rosenblatt (1985, 1991) speculates that children's affinity for efferent stance may be tied to the classroom context. She believes that the activities teachers design may "push the child mainly in an nonaesthetic direction" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 42). Thus when children ask us what they should write in their journals, we often reply, "Tell what you did after school yesterday." So that's what they give us—a chronology of their afternoon. Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1991) argues that while skilled readers/writers automatically adopt the appropriate stance, "this act of selective attention must be learned by children" (p.122) through indirect or direct teaching.

Our cumulative experience with this project, however, suggests that indirect teaching may not be sufficient. Many of the college pen pals offered repeated demonstrations of aesthetic response to life/literature, but most of the children did not adopt this stance in their return letters. Interactive instruction, anchored in an authentic context, may be needed to move young children to the evocation of personal response.

Similarly, most children chose not to respond to the affective content of their pen pals' letters. Of the 396 personal episodes shared by the college pen pals across the semester, only 95 (24%) were acknowledged by the children. When children do acknowledge, they do so about happy, familiar events, such as family trips, school events, and their pen pals. This finding raises questions about whether third graders are developmentally capable of empathetic response. Both Piaget and Kolhberg concluded that children under the age of 10 or 11 are unable to reason abstractly enough to perceive the affective needs of others. Consequently, they do not engage in prosocial acts unless they are directed by an authority figure or they expect a reciprocal gain. However, recent research suggests that the ability to empathize with others begins in infancy (Sagi & Hoffman, 1976; Simner, 1971). One and two-year-olds not only respond to others in emotional distress by staring at the individual or by crying themselves, but also begin to engage in prosocial interventions (call a caregiver, offer a bottle or toy) (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979) without prompting from others. Perspective-taking—the ability to step into the

emotional state of others and to infer their perspectives—continues to mature through the elementary grades along with the adoption of more appropriate prosocial actions (Eisenberg, 1982; Hoffman, 1982). Researchers caution, though, that empathy may not be a unitary construct (Grusec & Lytton, 1988). Empathetic response for some individuals may be aroused only in connection with negative emotions (sadness, fear) or with positive emotions (happiness, pride). Negative empathy resulted in prosocial actions for first graders; positive empathy did not (Sawin, 1979). Third and fourth grade boys responded to negative, but not positive, empathy; girls responded to both (Feshbach, 1982). Interestingly, the third graders in this study essentially responded only to the positive episodes shared by their pen pals (and in their own lives); negative episodes were not acknowledged.

In speculating about this lack of acknowledgment, we wondered whether perhaps the content shared by the college pen pals was outside of the child's experience and/or interest. Informal analysis of topics addressed revealed much congruence of topics. Both populations wrote primarily about family events (trips, holidays, family members...) and personal events (hobbies, school, birthdays, sports, favorite things...). A second more viable possibility is that the children did indeed acknowledge the content of their pen pals' letters but did so verbally within the social context of the classroom or of the home. However, without the triangulation of data such as participant observations and interviews, conclusions cannot be drawn.

A comparison of third graders' first and best letters during the second half of the semester revealed that these best letters were at least one letter type category higher for 79% of the writers. The third graders' letter writing, however, did not in steady increments. Sixty-three percent of the letter writers evidenced a undulating profile—one in which they advanced a category or two, then dipped a category or two. Many plateaued for two or more letters, and then moved ahead or dropped back. Learning to write letters, like learning in general, is a process in which

> ...individual children know and use a variety of ways of thinking, rather than just one, and where cognition involves constant competition among alternative ways of thinking, rather than sole reliance on a single way of thinking at any given age. Rather than stepping up from Strategy 1 to Strategy 2 to Strategy 3, children would be expected to use several strategies at any one time, with frequency of use of each strategy ebbing and flowing with increasing age and expertise. To capture this view in a visual metaphor, think of a series of

> overlapping waves... each wave corresponding to a different rule, strategy, theory or way of thinking. (Siegler, 1995, p. 409-410)

The "overlapping waves" of letter writing suggest that while young writers construct, test, and refine hypotheses about the epistolary genre in increasingly sophisticated ways, they do so in multiple ways.

A number of factors such as topic choice, time, and quality of pen pal letters undoubtedly contributed to the variability in the third graders' letters. With regard to topic choice, we found that children wrote their best letters when something "dramatic" occurred just prior to the letter writing episode. The drama associated with the raccoon that invaded the backyard, or the skiing trip that ended in a broken leg propelled letter writers forward. The third graders rarely elaborated on everyday occurrences. Hence, when children's perceptions of what constitutes a good letter is wrapped up in the notion of high drama, variability from letter to letter is inevitable.

Time constraints also contributed to the variability of letter quality. Unfortunately, a steady barrage of snow storms caused many school cancellations or delays. School schedules frequently were revised; writing workshop frequently was shortened. It was not uncommon for a child to produce a type 4 letter one week, and then a type 2 letter the next week, due in part to limited writing time. For example, during snowy week seven, eight letters dropped one category, five dropped two categories, two remained the same, and two moved up a category (two were absent).

In addition, the quality of the college pen pal letter may have contributed to the variability. While 98% of the letters demonstrated the essential communicative features of letters, 2% fell short on one of these features. For example, if college pen pals answered some but not all of their child's questions, it is possible that some of the third graders concluded that answering questions is an optional feature of letter writing.

Concluding Comments: Pedagogical Implications

Educators (Crowhurst, 1990; Rankin, 1992; Yellin, 1987) speak effusively about adult-child pen pal projects. This study joins that chorus. Over half of the third graders expressed their excitement about having a pen pal within the first or second letter, although none quite as passionately as

Theresa who wrote, "I can't wait to get another letter from you you'r the first pen pal I ever had and proubly the best thats what I think."

From the mid-point of the semester on, over half of the children asked to exchange phone numbers or home addresses. Four children also sent one or more extra letters/cards to their pen pals. By the end of the semester, sixteen (84%) of the nineteen children expressed sadness about the project's completion; many of the children asked their pen pals about continuing the letter writing over the summer.

> I have all my pin pal letters that you have sent me thay are in a Box Whith all letters I get from the mailbox How do you keep your letters and save them? It's too bad this is our sekaf to last letter, isn't it? Will you stal write to me?
>
> I so sad. We can still write to each other! I know this isn't our last letter. I hope you agree with writing to me forever. You're such a good pen pal. I am sad because the bad news maybe we can be phone pals

Given this enthusiastic endorsement, we are faced with the current debate of how best to support children's epistolary genre development. A number of genre theorists (Freedman 1993; Gee, 1989, Genishi, 1992) have endorsed the model of incidental learning. Freedman has posited that direct instruction in genres is not only unnecessary but potentially harmful. She argues that because genres are not static text structures but rather social actions of writers attempting to influence readers in particular ways, they need to be learned tacitly through immersion and authentic engagement. She also contends that the rules of genres are too complex and numerous to be taught explicitly—so complex in fact that because many teachers haven't mastered the intricacies of certain genres, they often teach students erroneous genres features and rules.

The efficacy of this immersion model, however, has been strongly contested by Delpit (1988) who has charged that while children who live in middle-class, literacy-rich home environments may intuit the forms and functions of literate activity, there is no evidence that this process-oriented approach works for children of color or children of poverty. According to Delpit, these children need explicit instruction in reading and writing. To deny children this instruction is to deny them to access to the dominant culture, to successful participation in society. Delpit has been joined in her call for explicit instruction by a group of Australian genre theorists (Christie,

1993; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Kress, 1993) who contend that all writers need explicit instruction in genres if they are to find their writing voices. These educators turn to the work of Vygotsky (1978) who theorized that while oral language is acquired naturally through social interaction, literacy is not as easily acquired. The acquisition of higher psychological processes such as reading and writing hinge not only on the social milieu but also on the active intervention of more knowledgeable others. As Vygotsky (1962) writes, "Instruction is one of the principal sources of the school child's concepts and is also a powerful force in directing their evolution; it determines the fate of his total mental development " (p. 85). Although many genre instruction theorists agree that children must participate in meaningful, socially-based literacy events, they argue that such immersion is not enough. Rather, both process and product must enter the educational equation if children are to experience the full power of literacy.

It is this latter stance that we endorse, believing that children need both "situated practice . . . immersion in experience and the utilization of available discourses" and "overt instruction . . . systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding" (New London Group, 1996, p. 88). Analysis of the intertextual understandings that third graders evidenced in this study suggests that children know a good deal about letter writing. It also suggests that these understandings can be clarified, refined and extended in significant ways with formal and informal instruction.

For example, the third graders' reluctance to adopt an aesthetic stance while writing and responding to letters suggests that children should be taught about the selection of stance Rosenblatt's (1991). Minilessons, anchored in the pen pals' letters, could be used to introduce the concept of personal response. Early in the project, children could be asked to locate a personal event about which their pen pals shared their opinions/feelings. Discussions about why pen pals included their opinions/feelings and how one might respond would follow.

In addition, exploration of authentic letters, as Walsh (1929) recommended many years ago, would be beneficial. The letters which Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to his young relatives (Walsh, 1929) or letters between fictional characters in books such as *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, *Nettie's Trip South*, and *Letters from Rifka* illuminate the affective nature of correspondence. Encouraging

children to reflect on the characteristics of these engaging letters should strengthen their understanding about the essence of letters. While these conversations about great letters could take place prior to the onset of a pen pal project, we suspect that they would carry greater import after a few sets of letters have been exchanged. The purpose of these conversations would not be for children to arrive at a "formula" for letter writing. Rather, it would be for children to savor the charm, vitality, and sensibility of engaging letters.

Collaborative letter writing also would be beneficial. As children generate ideas for the content of a letter, the importance of features such as a cordial opening and closing and of strategies such as rereading a letter to ensure that the sender's questions have been answered and topics of conversation acknowledged can be emphasized.

The degree to which children forged intertextual links in this study suggests the need for strong letter writing models. While seventy-five percent of the college pen pal letters were categorized as type 6 letters, twenty-three percent were type 5 letters. More concerted efforts need to be made in the college classroom to ensure that students internalize fully the art of letter writing. It would be helpful for the college pen pals to read and discuss "great letters." Two excellent sources of such are *Letters of a Nation* (Carroll, 1997) and *The World's Great Letters* (Schuster, 1940). In addition, prior to the project, students can be given a child's letter and asked to write return letters. After discussing these return letters, they could establish a checklist of what effective letter writers do. Students would be ask to use this checklist during the project.

Notwithstanding the limitations noted above, this study attests to the viability of adult-child pen pal projects. Pen pal projects allow children to bring to bear an impressive range of their intellectual powers as they problem solve the intricacies of the epistolary genre. They also allow us to extend children's thinking about the essential nature of the letter within the context of purposeful engagement.

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CONTINUUM OF

Search and Respond	Question or Parallel	Initiate
X	X	X
Type 1	**Type 2**	**Type 3**
Primary Attributes:	**Primary Attributes:**	**Primary Attributes**
*Child responds to a majority of pen pal's questions. (One sentence responses.)	*Child asks pen pal at least one question **or** parallels one aspect of pen pal's content. *Child responds to at least one of pen pal's questions. (One sentence response.) *Child includes one of the optional attributes.	* Child initiates new topic of conversation (One sentence in length.) *Child responds to at least 1/4 of pen pal's questions. (One sentence responses.) *Child includes one of the optional attributes.
Optional Attributes:	**Optional Attributes:**	**Optional Attributes:**
Child may include a cordial opening and/or closing. Child may compliment pal pal or extend gratitude.	Child may include a cordial opening and/or closing. Child may acknowledge one aspect of pen pal's content Child may compliment pen pal or extend gratitude.	Child may include a cordial opening and/or closing. Child may acknowledge one aspect of pen pal's content. Child may compliment pen pal or extend gratitude. Child may parallel one or more aspects of pen pal's content. Child may ask one or more questions.

Figure 1 Continuum of Letter Types

LETTER TYPES

Initiate and Elaborate	Initiate, Elaborate and Respond	Acknowledge...
_____X_____	_____X_____	_____X_____
Type 4	**Type 5**	**Type 6**
Primary Attributes:	**Primary Attributes:**	**Primary Attributes:**
*Child initiates and elaborates on new topic of conversation (two or more sentences).	*Child initiates, elaborates on and shares a personal response to a new topic of conversation.	*Child acknowledges at least one aspect of pen pal's content.
*Child responds to at least 1/2 of pen pal's questions.	* Child chunks related most information; letter flows in parts.	* Child initiates, elaborates on, and shares a personal response to a new conversation topic.
* Child chunks some information.	*Child includes a cordial opening and/or closing.	* Child responds to most questions, elaborating on at least one response.
* Child includes two or more of the optional attributes.	* Child responds to majority of pen pal's questions. (Two or more sentences.)	* Child chunks related information; letter flows.
		* Child includes a cordial opening and closing.
Optional Attributes:	**Optional Attributes:**	**Optional Attributes:**
Child may include a cordial opening and/or closing.	Child may compliment pen pal or extend gratitude.	Child may compliment pen pal or extend gratitude.
Child may acknowledge one or more aspects of pen pal's content.	Child may acknowledge one or more aspects of pen pal's content.	
Child may compliment pen pal or extend gratitude.		
Child may parallel one or more aspects of pen pal's content or ask a question(s).		
Child may elaborate on one or more responses to pen pal's questions.		

Part A	
College Pen Pal I am very excited about being your pen pal this semester.	Child Pen Pal I can't wait to get another letter from you. You'r the first pen pal I ever had and proubly the best thats what I think. And if you want please tell about any boys you like and I'll tell you about this boy I like on the next letter.
I like being able to share my thoughts with you.	You can tell me any secrets that you want and I'll keep them to myself. Well I have to go now.
Part B As for pets, I had a dog named Arfy, but she died two years ago. I was very sad because we had been together for 14 years and it was hard to get used to life without my oldest friend.	No acknowledgment
Remember how I told you about my fish, Henri? Well, I bought the blood worms—they weren't as yucky as I thought. At least, he is eating. He came with a plant that looks like it has green bananas growing on it. The plant came with a snail but Henri ate it. Oh, well!	No acknowledgment

Figure 2 Type 4 letter writers acknowledge pleasant events but not interesting or serious events

College Pen Pal	Child Pen Pal
What is the name of your pet fish?	My fish's name is "Jen" she loves to eat. once she jumped out of her tank and almost died but I got her into a cup and dumped her into her tank again.
I'm glad you managed to do something about the raccoon. Was it near your house?	We rilly did't get rid of the racoon yet. But But on Monday my daddy and me when't up on the rock, and we did't see the raccoon, and we think now it is gone, We don't know what mad it come to our hous,
Do you have a favorite book? Could you tell me about it?	I have a favorite book it's called Dracula It is so good! Dracula is about a girl who gets Biten 2 times so she is Dead and she becomes a Dracula and I'm skiping to the end ok they stick a sharp wood peace in Draculas hart.

Figure 3 Examples of type 4 letter writers' elaborated responses to questions

FIGURE 4

Always Open Pals

Pen Pals Forever

Thursday

Dear Gail,

How are you doing? I'm doing fine. I'll see if I can take this letter home to get you a picture but your going to Florida youll get baked likeicake. I hope you have fun. I've been there before it's awesome I went to Disney land (let me warn you something if you go on Space Mountain it's pretty fast) but about Space Mountain you can go on it if you want but I'm going to worry about you because people say that the track can break and I don't want it to break on you or any of the people.

Be Careful and watch the other People

Sorry about the stains

Make sure you call them up and tell them your friend.

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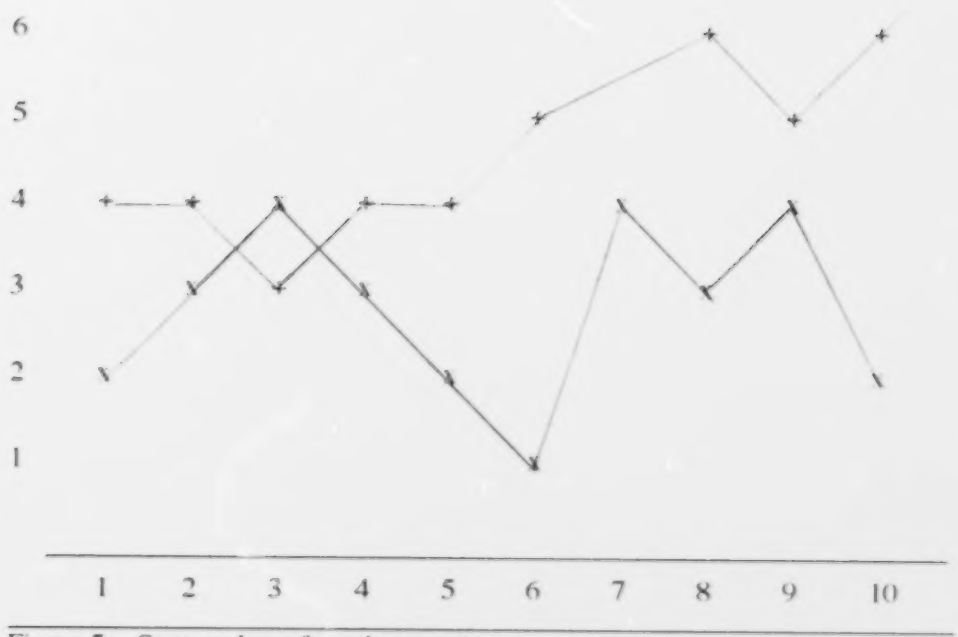

Figure 5 Scatter plots of two letter writers

Theresa: +
Ted: x